

Inner Work for Educators

Avraham Cohen, Ph. D., R.C.C., C.C.C.

City University of Seattle

Vancouver BC Canada

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Look well into thyself; there is a source of strength which will always spring up if thou wilt always look there. --

Marcus Aurelius

I don't believe anyone who is breathing and has reasonable brain function will debate that there is a lot more going on in a classroom than just curriculum delivery. My contention (Cohen, 2009) is that what goes on in the inner world of the educator and students has a crucial influence on the well-being of classroom citizens and that attending to this inner world in a direct and overt way is beneficial to students and educators and is facilitative and integrated with the identified curriculum.

Socrates famous line, "know thyself" points in the direction of the inner world for self discovery. Awa Kenzo (Stevens, 2007), a famous Japanese archery master said, "The essence of Buddhism is not meditation or liberation from samsara. It is *kensho*, "seeing into your nature"" (p. 44). These masters along with others have pointed in the directions of the inner life and inner work in the service of wholeness and a felt sense of connection and interbeing (Hanh, 1975/1987). Of course, there are others who might tell us that such contemplation is escapist and of no value in education or in life. That discussion is beyond the scope of this summary.

Davey (2007) states:

In funi, nonduality, the Creator and the created can be distinguished from one another, but they cannot ultimately be divided. Likewise, in the Japanese Ways the artist and the created cannot be separated. Nonduality, in fact, is more than a Japanese artistic construct and hints at the genuine nature of existence, which transcends cultural and relative distinctions. Funi then points to a state in which the division between ourselves and others, between life and death, dissolves. And with the dissolving of duality comes the transcendence of fear as well as conflict of every kind. (pp. 70-71)

I think this passage from Davey tells us in an indirect way about the importance of inner work for realization of the transcendent state of consciousness of nonduality requires a

commitment to persistent and ongoing innerwork. I believe this has particular application to environmentalists, particularly those who tend to separate themselves from the perceived perpetrators of environmental destruction. The tendency to make *other* those whom are seen as the enemy requires that you deny your own Shadow (Jung, 1961/1989). To deny your own Shadow is to separate yourself into parts, separate yourself from that which is perceived as other, and even to lose sight of that which is supposedly valued through a process of fusion with the other. This fusion is not the same as interbeing. Fusion requires a loss of awareness in the moment. Propensity to see otherness anywhere denotes a pattern that can and does easily bleed into relationship with the wanted and loved.

The primary and identified goal in contemporary North American classrooms is to ensure that students are given and assimilate the information that is identified as central to the course material. My contention is that a shift to the human beings as primary will, in fact, by de-objectifying the human beings serve the curriculum purpose better. For environmental educators I believe that this shift in focus can facilitate the growth of their ability to feel in an emotional and embodied way, in an increasingly more refined and fine-tuned way, and to feel there interbeingness with the natural world and with those perceived as the opposition. Experience of interbeing will support communication and connection between you and those others.

Inner Work in a Nutshell

What follows is a sketch of the inner work process in a general way. The details of how the inner work is performed is located in other places (Cohen, Bai, & Green, 2008; Cohen, 2009).

- An event takes place
- The event stimulates a reaction in your inner world

- You may notice an effort or a habitual pattern that is in the service of not feeling or noticing your inner experience
 - If your reaction is out of your awareness, no inner work can take place
- Move into personal inner space
- Feel the feelings
 - Look for the feelings beneath the initial feelings, i.e., helplessness
- Attend to any associated memories
- Note where attributions of power (the inner oppressor or the inner opposition) and helplessness (the victim) lie
- Fill out the identity that is associated with the identified experience
- ‘research’ the relationship between the identity with which you tend to identify yourself and the ‘alien’ identity
- Identify yourself with both sides, one at a time
 - Feel yourself into each identity
 - Work on establishing a dialogue between the two identities
 - Get to know the alien identity
 - Request feelings, intentions, and a better relationship
- Step back and reflect on the process

I will let James Lovelock (2009) have the last word:

What has moved me most during the writing of this book is the thought that we humans are vitally important as a part of Gaia, not through what we are now but through our potential as a species to be the progenitors of a much better animal. Like it or not we are now its heart and mind, but to continue to improve in this role we have to ensure our survival as a civilized species and not revert into a cluster of warring tribes that was a stage in our evolutionary history. Gaia has existed for more than a quarter of the age of the universe and it has taken this long for a species to evolve that can think, communicate and store its thoughts and experiences. As part of Gaia our presence begins to make the

planet sentient. We should be proud that we could be part of this huge step, one that may help Gaia to survive as the sun continues its slow but ineluctable increase of heat output making the solar system an increasingly hostile future environment.... If we can keep civilization alive through this century perhaps there is a chance that our descendants will one day serve Gaia and assist her in the fine-tuned self-regulation of the climate and composition of our planet. (p. 21)

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